

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Ramadan

August 21, 2009

On behalf of the American people, including Muslim communities in all 50 States, I want to extend best wishes to Muslims in America and around the world: *Ramadan Kareem*.

Ramadan is the month in which Muslims believe the Koran was revealed to the prophet Muhammad, beginning with a simple word, *iqra*. It is therefore a time when Muslims reflect upon the wisdom and guidance that comes with faith and the responsibility that human beings have to one another and to God.

Like many people of different faiths who have seen Ramadan through our communities and families, I know this to be a festive time, a time when families gather and meals are shared. But I also know that Ramadan is a time of intense devotion and reflection, a time when Muslims fast during the day and perform *tarawih* prayers at night, reciting and listening to the entire Koran over the course of the month.

These rituals remind us of the principles that we hold in common, and Islam's role in advancing justice, progress, tolerance, and the dignity of all human beings. For instance, fasting is a concept shared by many faiths, including my own Christian faith, as a way to bring people closer to God and to those among us who cannot take their next meal for granted. And the support that Muslims provide to others recalls our responsibility to advance opportunity and prosperity for people everywhere. For all of us must remember that the world we want to build, and the changes that we want to make, must begin in our own hearts, and our own communities.

This summer, people across America have served in their communities: educating children, caring for the sick, and extending a hand to those who have fallen on hard times. Faith-based organizations, including many Islamic organizations, have been at the forefront in participating in this summer of service. And in these challenging times, this is a spirit of responsibility that we must sustain in the months and years to come.

Beyond America's borders, we're also committed to keeping our responsibility to build a world that is more peaceful and secure. That's why we're responsibly ending the war in Iraq. That's why we are isolating violent extremists while empowering the people in places like Afghanistan and Pakistan. And that is why we strongly and actively support a two-state solution that recognizes the rights of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. That's also why America will always stand for the universal rights of all people to speak their mind, practice their religion, contribute fully to their society, and have confidence in the rule of law.

All of these efforts are a part of America's commitment to engage Muslims and Muslim-majority nations on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect. And at this time of renewal, I want to reiterate my commitment to a new beginning between America and Muslims around the world.

As I said in Cairo, this new beginning must be borne out in a sustained effort to listen to each other, to learn from each other, to respect one another, and to seek common ground. I believe an important part of this is listening, and in the last 2 months, American Embassies around the world have reached out not just to governments, but directly to people in Muslim-

majority countries. And from around the world, we have received an outpouring of feedback about how America can be a partner on behalf of peoples' aspirations.

We have listened, and like you, we are focused on pursuing concrete actions that will make a difference over time, both in terms of the political and security issues that I have discussed and in the areas that you have told us will make the most difference in peoples' lives.

These consultations are helping us implement the partnerships that I called for in Cairo, to expand education exchange programs, to foster entrepreneurship and create jobs, and to increase collaboration on science and technology, while supporting literacy and vocational learning. We're also moving forward in partnering with the OIC and the OIC member states to eradicate polio, while working closely with the international community to confront the common health challenges like H1N1, which I know is of particular concern to many Muslims preparing for the Hajj.

All of these efforts are aimed at advancing our common aspirations: to live in peace and security, to get an education and to work with dignity, to love our families, our communities, and our faith. It will take time and patient effort. We cannot change things over night, but we can honestly resolve to do what must be done, while setting off in a new direction, toward the destination that we seek for ourselves and for our children. That is the journey that we must travel together.

I look forward to continuing this critically important dialog and turning it into action. And today I want to wish Muslims across America and around the world a blessed month as you welcome the beginning of Ramadan. May God's peace be upon you.

NOTE: The President's remarks were videotaped on August 31 at 1:45 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House for later broadcast. In the address, the President referred to OIC, the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The Office of the Press Secretary also released Arabic, Bengali, Dari, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Pashto, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu language transcripts of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Ramadan, videotaped remarks.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Subjects: Afghanistan : Insurgency and terrorist attacks; Diseases : Global influenza outbreak; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Faith-based and community organizations : Programs and services; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic efforts, expansion; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Middle East : Peace and democracy efforts; Organization of the Islamic Conference; Pakistan : Insurgency and terrorist attacks; Ramadan; Voluntarism.

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